

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 11061 01 OF 02 231630Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 NEAE-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
TRSE-00 OMB-01 ACDA-12 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04
SIL-01 HA-05 /105 W
-----004086 231656Z /45

O 231552Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0132
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 11061

Z.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IS, EG, XF
SUBJECT: CABINET APPROVES BEGIN PROPOSALS: DEBATE CONTIUNES IN OTHER
FORA

1. SUMMARY: A MARATHON CABINET SESSTION, WHICH BEGIN
DENIED WAS DISCORDANT, APPROVED PROPOSALS HE WILL SUBMIT
TO SADAT ON CHRISTMAS. WHILE THE PRESS COMPETS
IN REPORTING DETAILS OF THE PLAN, AWARENESS OF DIFFICULT
NEGOTIATIONS AHEAD ON ISRAEL-EGYPT ISSUES -- LET ALONE
CONCERNING THE WEST BANK -- IS CREEPING INTO THE REPROTING.
HERUT LEADER MOSHE ARENS SPOKE OF POSSIBLE WAR
AND THE LABOR PARTY DEBATED THE BEGIN PLAN WITH MOST
ACTIVISTS CRITICIZING WEST BANK AUTONOMY AS LEADING TO
A PALESTINAIN STATE AND THE ABANDONMENT OF SETTLEMENTS
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 11061 01 OF 02 231630Z

BEYOND THE GREEN LINE. END SUMMARY

2. AT THE CONCLUSION OF A SEVEN AND ONE HALF HOUR
MARATHON SESSION YESTERDAY, THE CABINET UNANIMOUSLY
APPROVED THE PROPOSALS BEGIN WILL PRESENT TO SADAT AT
THEIR CHRISTMAS SUMMIT IN ISMAILIA. ANSWERING REPORTERS'
QUESTIONS AFTER THE MEETING, BEGIN DENIED THAT ITS ALMOST

UNPRECEDENTED LENGTH DENOTED DISAGREEMENT OR CONTROVERSY. HE SAID MANY QUESTIONS WERE ASKED AND MINISTERS SOUGHT CLARIFICATION OF NUMEROUS POINTS BUT ALL WERE IN GENERAL ACCORD ON HIS PLAN. HOWEVER, MANY OBSERVERS WERE UNCONVINCED. BEGIN CALLED THE CABINET MEETING THE BEST AND MOST PRODUCTIVE HE HAD EVER ATTENDED.

3. TODAY'S PRESS ALSO CONTINUED ITS HEAVY REPORTING OF FRAGMENTARY, SOMETIMES CONTRADICTORY DETAILS OF THE PLAN, SOME BASED ON LEADS WHILE OTHERS ARE MORE SPECULATIVE, AND QUOTE BEGIN AS SAYING WHAT HE WILL CARRY TO ISMAILIA DIFFERS FROM THE PROPOSALS HE PRESENTED TO PRESIDENT CARTER. BENZIMAN (HAARETZ) MAINTAINS THAT BEGIN MADE CHANGES FOLLOWING CONVERSATIONS WITH DAYAN. BEGIN ALSO REPORTEDLY BACKED AWAY, IN THE FACE OF CABINET OPPOSITION, FROM HIS PROPOSAL THAT THE ENTIRE MINISTERIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE (EIGHT MINISTERS) ACCOMPANY HIM TO ISMAILIA. INSTEAD THE CABINET APPROVED AN OFFICIAL PARTY LIMITED TO BEGIN, DAYAN AND WEIZMAN. THE PRESS ALSO REPORTS THAT A LONG-TIME FRIEND OF BEGIN, NISSIM GA'ON OF GENEVA, MRS. BEGIN AND MRS. ABBA EBAN WILL ACCOMPANY THE PARTY. MRS. EBAN IS A NATIVE OF ISMAILIA AND HER INCLUSION SUPPOSEDLY REPRESENTS A TYPICALLY COURTLY GESTURE BY THE PRIME MINISTER.

4. AS FOR THE PRESS MOOD, WE DETECT A SLIGHT SHIFT IN THE TONE OF THE PRESS TODAY REGARDING NEGOTIATIONS WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 11061 01 OF 02 231630Z

EGYPT. IT IS LESS OPTIMISTIC IN THE WAKE OF BROAD HINTS THAT WEIZMAN'S TALKS WITH SADAT AND GAMASY WERE DIFFICULT. APPREHENSION OVER SUNDAY'S TALKS HAS BEGUN TO CREEP IN AMID REMINDERS OF HARD BARGAINING AHEAD.

5. BEGIN BRIEFED THE KNESSET'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE TODAY; THE SESSION WAS ADJOURNED AFTER FOUR HOURS AND WILL RESUME SATURDAY EVENING. COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MOSHE ARENS SOUNDED A CHARACTERISTICALLY SOMBER NOTE YESTERDAY. HE TOLD THE ISRAELI-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION THAT A WAR WITH SYRIA AND IRAQ WHICH WOULD DRAG IN EGYPT IS POSSIBLE DESPITE CURRENT PEACE TALKS. EVEN WITHOUT EGYPT, A SYRIAN-IRAQI COMBINATION WOULD MAKE A FORMIDABLE FOE, HE WARNED. ARENS HAD EARLIER THIS WEEK VOICED HIS SKEPTICISM TO US BY CITING AMERICAN AND OTHER STUDENTS OF EGYPTIAN AFFAIRS AS SOURCES FOR HIS BELIEF THAT EGYPT IS A HIGHLY MANIPULATIVE SOCIETY WHICH COULD EASILY SWITCH FROM ITS PRESENT PEACE-SEEKING ATTITUDE TO ONE COMMITTED TO WAR SHOULD A NEW LEADER OR SADAT HIMSELF SO DECREE.

6. BEGIN POSTPONED UNTIL NEXT WEEK A MEETING OF THE HERUT

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 11061 02 OF 02 231637Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 11061

CENTRAL COMMITTEE SET TO HEAR HIM LAST NIGHT. THIS DID
LITTLE TO DAMPEN THE RUMBLINGS OF DISCONTENT WITHIN
HIS PARTY. IN THE MEANTIME, OTHER PARTIES ARE BUSY
CAUCUSING. THE DMC IS MEETING TODAY. THE LABOR PARTY
BUREAU AND ITS KNESSET FACTION MET LAST NIGHT TO DISCUSS
STRATEGY. THE MEETING HIGHLIGHTED DIVISIONS IN THE PARTY
TOWARD THE BEGIN PLAN, WITH MOST SPEAKERS CRITICAL.
PERES INSISTED ON AUTONOMOUS WEST BANK MUST BE LINKED
TO JORDAN, OR ELSE AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE WOULD
EVENTUATE AND JEWISH SETTLEMENT ON THE WEST BANK WOULD
BE RENDERED IMPOSSIBLE. PERES ALSO FEARED THAT LOCAL AUTO-
NOMY WOULD OPEN THE GATES TO PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN
NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. SPEAKERS FROM THE SEVERAL KIBBUTZ
MOVEMENTS SPOKE STRONGLY AGAINST ABANDONING SETTLEMENTS
IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OR REMOVING THEM. ON THE
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 11061 02 OF 02 231637Z

OTHER HAND MK YOSHI SARID FIRMLY SUPPORTED BEGIN'S PLAN AND ABBA EBAN MAINTAINED THAT IN THE COURSE OF NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN WOULD YET ADOPT THE ALIGNMENT'S PLATFORM. OTHERS LIVING UP BEHIND THE PLAN WERE ZADOK AND NAVON. BARLEV OPPOSED; BUT THE MOST VOCIFEROUS CRITIC OF THE PLAN IN THE LABOR PARTY, GOLDA MEIR, WAS ABSENT.

7. THE NRP'S KNESSET FACTION MET DECEMBER 21. INSIDERS TOLD US THAT DISCUSSION REFLECTED THE TRANSFORMATION THAT HAD OCCURRED SINCE SADAT'S INITIATIVE AMONG SUCH ONE-TIME HARDLINERS AS HAMMER AND BEN MEIR. WHAT FEW RESERVATIONS TO THE BEGIN PLAN THAT WERE VOICED CENTERED ON CONCERN FOR THE SETTLEMENTS ON THE WEST BANK. APPARENTLY ONLY MK HAIM DRUCKMAN WAS OUTRIGHT CRITICAL. A WIDER NRP MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 26.

8. COMMENT: DESPITE THE CABINET'S UNANIMOUS APPROVAL, THE LENGTH OF THE SESSION INDICATES BEGIN'S PROPOSALS DID NOT FIND EASY ACCEPTANCE. THE NEED TO RECONVENE THE KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, ADJOURNED BECAUSE OF THE APPROACHING SABBATH, ALSO TESTIFIES TO SOME DIFFICULTY IN ADJUSTING TO BEGIN'S CONCESSIONS. HARDLY ANY ISRAELI IS NOW SAYING BEGIN IS NOT GOING FAR ENOUGH.

9. ON THE EVE OF BEGIN'S DEPARTURE FOR ONE MORE IN THE LENGTHENING LIST OF THIS YEAR'S HISTORIC MEETINGS, THE MAIN CONCERNS OF THE COALITION PARTIES AND THE ALIGNMENT, AS WELL AS THE GENERAL PUBLIC, SEEM TO FOCUS INCREASINGLY ON THE FEAR OF A FUTURE PALESTINIAN STATE AND THE FATE OF THE SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. THE SECURITY PROBLEM PER SE AS IT IMPINGES ON THE ISSUE OF BORDERS AND VARIOUS SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS IS BEING LEFT TO THE MILITARY EXPERTS. THROUGH IT ALL HOPE AND EX-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 11061 02 OF 02 231637Z

PECTATIONS OF PEACE CONTINUES STRONG--EVEN AMONG THE PLAN'S CRITICS.
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